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Getting Carded New smart cards verify IDs while boosting protection

By Gregg K. Kakesako
gkakesako@starbulletin.com



CRAIG T. KOJIMA/CKOJIMA@STARBULLETIN.COM
George Miller holds a sample of the new security card (left) and the old green card.

The Pentagon hopes that by the end of this year, all of Hawaii's active-duty personnel, family members and Defense Department contractors will be linked into its smart-card technology and be issued a new identification card featuring embedded memory and a microprocessor circuit chip.

Brad Stonesifer, U.S. Pacific Command smart-card coordinator, said current plans call for converting nearly 4 million people in the military worldwide by the beginning of the federal fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1.

In Hawaii that covers about 76,000 people.

Stonesifer said all military services will get equipment in April to issue the new identification cards, which are about the size of a credit card and will contain information similar to what is on the current cards — name, color picture, pay grade, rank, and issuing and expiration dates.

However, Stonesifer said the common access card will do more than replace the current green identification card.

"It is capable of combining several functions into one card," he said. "These functions enable access to buildings and controlled spaces, computer network and system access, and being the main platform for public key infrastructure, which reinforces information security.

"With public key infrastructure, all DoD computers will have a device where users swipe or insert their cards to log on to their computers. This system allows for the encryption or encoding of e-mail and the ability to electronically sign documents. Business can now be conducted electronically with confidence in the integrity of the transmission of the data and in the identity of the originator and recipient. The obvious goal of all this is additional security. No one will be able to log on to your computer, even if they have your name and password."

Stonesifer said the chip on the common access card will have 32 kilobytes of usable data space. It also will have a magnetic stripe and bar codes.

The chip will contain information such as name, gender, benefits and privileges, blood type, organ donor information for military personnel, digital certificates and other application-specific data.

The magnetic stripe will be used to carry building access information.

Personal data such as name, Social Security number, birth date, pay and benefit information, organizational affiliation and pay grade will be programmed into the bar codes.

Service members will be able to access the information on the memory chip using their personal identification number (PIN).

Stonesifer said the Army here already has been using this technology for years with the issuance of smart cards that give soldiers access to their cafeterias or mess halls. It also contains other information such as medical and training records and has been used to keep track of soldiers whenever they are deployed.

Tech. Sgt. George Miller, who is in charge of the military personnel flight customer service, said five stations will be set up at his office at Hickam to begin issuing the cards in April.

Master Sgt. Rick Hennington, superintendent of Hickam's customer service, said he expects to issue 5,000 cards, and plans to do it by units.

Stonesifer said the Navy plans a similar mass issuance program.

Joe Bonfiglio, Army spokesman, said local commanders still have not been told when soldiers here will get the new cards. However, Stonesifer believes the Army will use what he described as a "sustainment plan," where the new cards will be issued only when the soldier's current green identification card expires or when a soldier seeks a replacement one.

There are no plans to issue these new cards to family members, retirees or reservists who are inactive. National Guard and other reservists will get theirs next year, officials said.